

Introductory remarks by H.E. Oleh Shamshur,
Ambassador of Ukraine to the United States,

at the Congressional Briefing
“The Legacy of Chernobyl: 1986 to 2006 and beyond”

(US Capitol Building, April 27)

Chairpersons,
Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This briefing is in a way a consummation of a series of the hearings, conferences and exhibitions that have been recently held in Washington to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, the worst technological catastrophe in human history. Let me express our sincere gratitude to our esteemed chairpersons, senator Brownback, congressman Smith, members of the Ukrainian congressional caucus for their leadership in this process. It was my privilege to address those distinguished fora.

These events were an important part of a larger set of commemorations organized practically throughout the world. I would like to mention specifically the international conference “Twenty Years after the Chernobyl catastrophe. Looking in future” and Humanitarian Forum “Rebirth, Renewal and Human Development” in Kyiv which were attended by numerous participants representing leading inter-governmental organizations, NGOs and leading experts – both Ukrainian and international.

It is quite telling that titles and substance of the Kyiv conference and today’s briefing largely coincide as both concern the legacy of Chernobyl, dreadful legacy of nuclear devastation, millions people affected by the radioactive fall-out in many countries of the world and suffering due to the hazardous Chernobyl effects, hundred thousands perished, contaminated soil and forests, abandoned households, tremendous economic loss.

At the same time both fora pose the most essential question – where do we move from here to overcome the consequences of the disaster, what modern technologies can we use to overcome the long-lasting medical and environmental effects of Chernobyl radiation, how can we bring the contaminated areas back to life and create new opportunities for the affected population. The time that passed since the tragic day of the 26th of April, 1986 has proved the pressing necessity of promoting comprehensive inter-disciplinary study of Chernobyl related problems, encompassing technological, medical, biological, medical, environmental and sociological aspects. This especially relevant as I am deeply convinced that in our assessment of the aftermath of the Chernobyl catastrophe we should never forget that experts and humankind as a whole are yet to comprehend and measure the full scope of the nuclear devastation. In this respect, we are facing numerous challenges. The gravest implications of Chernobyl might lie well ahead for Ukraine and other nations. We should be alert and well prepared to act.

In his Address on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the accident at the Chernobyl NPS President Yuschenko noted that “the phenomenon of Chernobyl is not limited by the physical dimension. On our soil total neglect of laws of humanity and nature have resulted in nuclear strike. This strike has become the last one for the former political epoch. It was its final condemnation. In spite of the evil, challenges faced by Ukraine, have not diminished its will and desire to resurrection, and with this belief in resurrection we are continuing our movement forward.”

In our endeavors we would like to continue to count upon the assistance of our partners as Ukraine's Chornobyl related losses will amount to 170 bln usd by 2015. This year's commemorative events have demonstrated again a huge potential of the goodwill on the part of the international community.

I think it will be appropriate to mention here passing of the US House Representatives Resolution 703 introduced by congressmen Gallegly, Hyde, Lantos and Wexler. We consider this resolution as an evidence of your undiminished sympathy as well as pragmatic approach to dealing with the existing challenges. We especially appreciate it appeal to all the responsible members of the international community to step up their efforts to this effect.

The problems are numerous and serious. However, the two of them have the utmost urgency.

The first is the creation of the new confinement over the ill-fated reactor #4 still holding 200 tons of the nuclear fuel as the old shelter is rapidly deteriorating. The practical work may start already in summer. The most important issue is the reliability of the new structure. We hope that all G8 members and other countries concerned to follow the example of the US Government and to make adequate financial contributions for the erection of the Shelter-2. We also urge all the signatories of the Ottawa Memorandum to honor their obligations concerning compensation of the losses suffered by Ukraine due to the decommissioning of the Chornobyl NPS.

The second is meeting the health needs of the innocent children, suffering from hazardous effects of Chornobyl. We deeply appreciate the work done in this respect by the members of the US Congress Chris Smith and Lincoln Diaz-Ballard. It was largely due to Mr. Diaz-Ballard's efforts that on April 20th one of the biggest humanitarian airlifts organized by the Children of Chornobyl Fund arrived in Ukraine for the benefit of Chornobyl-affected children. I know that more projects are in preparation and I'm deeply thankful for them to our American partners. In connection to this I would also like to draw your attention to the project of the creation of the Medical Center for Mother and Child that will be introducing a number of innovative programs in hematology, oncology, cord blood banking etc.

Chornobyl has taught us a host of extremely painful lessons. Now it is up to us to make the proper use of them and move ahead. I strongly believe that our two countries – Ukraine and the United States – will stand united in facing the challenges and preventing any new human tragedies that might be caused by the consequences of the disaster that happened twenty years ago, but remains so present in our lives.